

To this reader, they should either appear on the first mention of the features portrayed, or in a location where it makes more sense (say, p. 145, when the irrigation feature's inauguration is discussed). Similarly, the maps serve as frontispiece material to the two main 'parts' of the book, and there is no real use or discussion of them. The second and third maps, especially, have no legend to explain what lines refer to roads and footpaths. Worse yet, when the challenges of transportation or logical support for cotton farmers are ably discussed, in chapters six and seven, the figures that could help the reader are not even referred to in the pertinent paragraph. The research itself is aptly documented by notes, a good bibliography with archival listings, and a useful index.

My principal hesitation in recommending the work for classroom use is the limited story it tells. All research monographs, especially first ones, admittedly have a limited scope, time, region, and context. What is perhaps distinctive in this case is the highly detailed historical reconstruction of the federal Mexican government's attempts to modernize and create a regional development plan in northern Mexico. Walsh, to simplify, is an historian's anthropologist. Portions of this book will appeal to borderlands specialists, geographers, and historians. Historical geographers working in commodity studies will find much of interest in Walsh's treatment of the fall of King Cotton in northern Mexico. Individuals, politicians, capitalists, and the state all play a role in the book. If it does not garner a huge audience based on the area, subject or time-span, however, I would urge those engaged in comparative international work to seek out the valuable insights that *Building the Borderlands* provides.

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I.G. Simmons, *Global Environmental History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008, xvi + 271, US\$49 hardback.

This volume is the third of a trilogy that begins with an ecological history of the British environment across the last ten millennia, and then turns to a more detailed study of the moorlands of England and Wales. Set at a global scale, the third volume focuses on the bigger picture,

opening with a resonant introduction to the interlocking intellectual issues, before embarking on what appears to be a standard narrative of diachronic environmental history: a) hunter-foragers; b) pre-industrial agriculture; c) an industrialized world; and d) the globalized electronic world after 1950. I say 'appears,' because this agenda marks a quantum leap from the rote and wearisome foundations that some authors use as prelude to their ringing indictment of impending ecological disaster.

Instead, Simmons' periodization is based on energy access, each chapter beginning with an ecological analysis. It then continues with a review of the long-term interaction of nature and society, seen through the lenses of 'cohesion/coalescence' and 'fragmentation' between the two. Next, the author attempts to characterize how this relationship was represented by its original actors – versus how we see this today. In the end, an environmental outcome is suggested. Such a reflexive analysis of connectivities is bound to frustrate the impatient reader in search of ready lecture material.

The author displays intellectual acumen, discussing environmental change, economic rationales, and cultural dispositions with ease, sometimes enlivened by quotations of British literary figures, or his own evocative turns of phrase. A selection of items captures the tenor and range of the presentation: 'Nature is animated and mystical; the land is giving and sharing,' or, in Australia, 'the aboriginal song lines saturate the land with significance' (p. 22). Analogies or anecdotes from classical music abound, but these historical chapters are also packed with ethnographic, biological and economic explanations that display the author's erudition. There are statistics on the production of piggeries, estimates of carbon footprints, and comments on the class origins of fox hunting or grouse blasting. One may also read that 'The ecological basis of all forms of pastoralism is the transformation of cellulose' (!) (p. 70), or that the time of industrial transformation was 'when many stomachs were filled by agriculture but many more were born to grow!' (p. 97). There are masterful convergences, such as the extended Table 4.1 ('Environmental impact of the city'), clever insights such as 'Print...became a validating medium like men in pulpits in another era' (p. 146), and interesting linkages, such as the marriage of commerce and science at World Fairs. Suburbs, industrial zones, and shopping malls, like concentration camps, are seen as products of single purpose planning, a collapse of continuity, and the fragmentation of ecosystems (p. 151).

The chapter on the post-industrial era sometimes seethes with suppressed anger, but the din of numerical factoids makes for choppy reading. I was therefore

unprepared for what I had supposed would be a concluding overview, under the title of ‘Emerging themes.’ Instead I found a posthistorical and triumphant ‘fourth movement’. It was a *summa* of ideas and opinions that had already been begun without fanfare in the introduction. Just a few of these thoughts would include the distinction of morality and ethics; the persistent myth of a Golden Age when humans and nature were in harmony; dominion, authority and social control; social justice as equitable distribution; balance, contingency and sustainability in the limits of growth; or the liability of climate, economies, and social systems to non-linear change against a backdrop of complexity and chaos. These two parts of the volume would provide the menu for a provocative seminar: thoughts rather than blatant advocacy, experience and wisdom rather than brassy and inconvenient ‘truths.’

At a conference in Sweden, shortly after Ian Simmons had retired from Durham University, I asked him what he was working on. In his modest, self-deprecating way he smiled and responded with something like ‘Nothing much.’ But he actually was completing *Global Environmental History*. Nothing much, indeed!

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Georgina H. Endfield, *Climate and Society in Colonial Mexico: a Study in Vulnerability*, Malden and Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2008, xi + 235 pages, US\$39.95 paperback.

Georgina H. Endfield masterfully demonstrates that Mexico’s national and regional archives, despite decades of analysis by historical geographers and other scholars in allied fields, remain an invaluable and still largely unexplored resource for understanding the complex changing relationship between colonial Mexican society and the natural environment. The opening sentence of *Climate and Society in Colonial Mexico* well captures the book’s narrative tone: ‘28 June 1692 was a very wet day in Celaya, Guanajuato’ (p. 1). Endfield then recounts how late in the evening the nearby River Laja leapt its banks, smashed through Celaya, and left around 3000 families homeless. Laced throughout the book are other similar examples that Endfield draws upon to construct a penetrating analysis of the changing

social contexts of vulnerability to climatic variability and extreme meteorological events in colonial Mexico (1521–1821).

Climate and Society in Colonial Mexico focuses on the agricultural sectors of three case study regions, each with different pre-Hispanic, colonial, and environmental characteristics that together do well to represent the country. In order of increasing precipitation and from north to south, these are Chihuahua’s Conchos Basin, Guanajuato and the wider Bajío, and the Valley of Oaxaca. An early chapter provides high-level overviews of each case study region’s social and biophysical contexts. These serve well to frame subsequent discussions of climatic events as well as make the work accessible to non-specialists. Endfield then details how newly conquered lands became Crown possessions and were subsequently compartmentalized and awarded as land grants, primarily for livestock grazing and agriculture. The Crown awarded most of the land grants to Spaniards but through the granting process native communities also secured rights to their traditional lands. However, the patterns of land ownership within the case study regions were not the same and here Endfield begins to fulfill her book’s intent. In Oaxaca, natives retained much of their land as communal holdings, whereas in Guanajuato and Chihuahua landed estates of livestock and staple crops dominated as some Spaniards grew increasingly wealthy through commerce and mining. This resulted in a massively unequal distribution of land and wealth within those two regions. In turn, the poorest sectors became more vulnerable to climatic events as they became increasingly reliant upon good years of precipitation in order to afford food and avoid famine.

Endfield then examines how colonial society developed adaptive strategies to buffer against the consequences of climatic events. A particularly interesting and well-crafted discussion centers on the building of dams in Guanajuato. By the eighteenth century damming had become fairly commonplace in the region as a strategy to prevent flooding. Because all community members were vulnerable to a flood event, it was not unusual for a dam to be built with Spanish funds and native labor. Although the dams usually reduced the risk of flooding from heavy rains, communities sometimes failed to sufficiently maintain their dams or dredge the sediments behind them, which then increased the flood vulnerability over time.

Subsequent chapters explore how climatic variability influenced societal relations, such as the litigation that arose during droughts in response to greater competition